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4-H Club Work

Old And New Objectives

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Boys and girls clubs.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

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I.

Old Objectives.

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I forego an account of the history of the 4-H club work over the past thirty years, however interesting and profitable that might be. I shall, therefore, ignore questions of the origin and technical development of the 4-H clubs from stage to stage with respect to time, place, and persons. Let me begin simply with the legal authority for the 4-H club work.

The Capper-Ketcham Act of 1928, based explicitly on the preceding acts in behalf of agricultural extension, authorized the expenditure of U. S. Government funds (I qote here) "to further develop the cooperative extension system in agriculture and home economics with men, women, boys, and girls." The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 which, bear in mind, was the legal base for the Capper-Ketcham Act, defined this cooperative extension system in agriculture and home economics as follows: "Giving of instruction and practical demonstrations in agriculture and home economics, ... and imparting information on said subjects through field demonstrations, publications, and otherwise."

The 4-H club work was doubtless justified from 1914 to 1928, before the term "boys and girls" was a specified part of the law (whenever the U. S. Government funds were expended on it) as simply a part of "the cooperative extension system in agriculture and home economics," having the same motives, the same objectives, the same authority as all the rest of the extension work. Since 1928 and the passage of the Capper-Ketcham Act, every scintilla of doubt about the legal standing of the 4-H club work has been swept away, by the express mention of "boys and girls" as beneficiaries of the act. Furthermore, the motivation of the agricultural and home economics work with boys and girls is quite plainly in the Capper-Ketcham Act brought over from the act of 1914 and considered to be identical with the motive of the work with men and women, viz., instruction

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*Addresses delivered before the leaders of the 4-H club work at the National 4-H Club Camp, Washington, D. C., June 18 and 19, 1930, by Dr. C. J. Galpin, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

and demonstrations in agriculture and home economics. I cite these authorities for the 4-H clubs for the purpose of getting on to the sure ground of facts in regard to the objectives of 4-H club work. I do not see how we can get away from the conclusion that the administrators of the 4-H club work must hold to the old legal objectives: first, diffusion of "useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics;" and secondly, encouragement "in the application" of this information.

With this introduction to my subject, let me proceed to scrutinize these objectives to see whether the present trend of 4-H club work is veering from the legal purpose in any essential respect, and whether secondly, the value of these objectives after a fair trial of several years holds up to original expectations. At this point, it seems desirable to call attention to the Hatch Act of 1887, the Adams Act of 1906, and the Purnell Act of 1925, establishing and further developing State Agricultural Experiment Stations. These acts are highly significant for a fuller understanding of the mind of Congress in relation to the whole extension system; for the acts define more particularly what is included in "agriculture and home economics" and in scientific development of the same; and also because the three acts successively elaborate upon points in the definition so as to keep step with scientific discoveries in laboratories, keep step with farm practice techniques, and with advances in the economics and sociology of rural life. The inclusion of these points was all along admissible by inference; but the law, act by act, took points out of the inferential class, and made them specific as parts of the agriculture and home economics definition. Notably this specific elaboration stands out in the Purnell Act, which states that "agriculture and home economics" include and cover the following detailed legal objectives, viz., "production, manufacture, preparation, use, distribution, and marketing of agricultural products," ..... "and the establishment and maintenance of a permanent and efficient agricultural industry," and "the development and improvement of the rural home and rural life," by "economic and sociological investigations." It can not, therefore, longer be doubted that it is mandatory upon the agricultural extension system to give "useful and practical instruction to men, women, boys and girls" in whatever important agricultural and home economics truths may be discovered as a result of the lawful researches of State Agricultural Experiment Stations: and the mandate thus consciously widens considerably the field of 4-H club work when compared with what was recognized some years ago. To put the matter fairly and squarely before you, the old objectives of 4-H club work, thought of in the narrow terms of farm practice and housekeeping, have widened to include also the economics of agriculture and home making and the sociological relations of the farm home and of rural life as a whole.

Some of you will remember a period in 4-H club work when the choice of projects for the boys and girls in a community was not subjected to the test of whether these projects were economically sound as profit-making enterprises in the particular locality. Those were days when the role of economics in agricultural extension was only dimly perceived. Now projects, in order to pass the test of being "practical in application," must be unmistakably adapted to the conditions under which the boys and girls live. So the original objectives have in actual practice been materially widened to include the economice of agricultural practice; and this addition has, in turn, set a more rigid standard for the selection of projects and brought a heavier responsibility upon the local 4-H club leaders and counselors.

Another trend in the work is worth mentioning in this connection. The 4-H clubs have always had a club organization, but, at first, this officering and management of the club's affairs were apt to be regarded as only a mechanical necessity for the immediate purposes of the club. Organization itself was not subjected to the sociological test of good organization. So it sometimes happened that a shiftless type of club behavior was the outcome. Now, however, it is being discerned that organization is in itself a piece of social activity and group behavior which has a positive bearing upon the permanence of the agricultural industry. Defective organization and thoughtless group conduct of 4-H clubs, it becomes evident, lead not only to ineffective club results, but what is still worse, to bad sociological habits and group behavior in the community. So it has come about that club organization has been raised to the rank of an objective among other objectives. But this trend must be interpreted like the economic trend, as more perfectly putting into effect the old original objectives, rather than a veering away from the original purposes.

Many other club activities during recent years will occur to you with a question on your lips as to their relation to objectives. I refer to such activities as games, sports, camp life, musical fetes, club songs, plays, exhibits, pageants, trips, suppers, and the like. Are these intrusions? Or are they simply concessions to youth and quite apart from, if not at variance with, the serious objectives of the 4-H clubs? No, these are items in a permanent agriculture. They form a part of ordinary rural life. The Magna Charta of 4-H club work holds a place for these activities - only one should point out that these activities must submit to the test of standards. The "improvement of the farm and home and rural life" can not come through activities which violate good taste, the canons of music, the technique of dramatics, the principles of physical education and recreation. So all those elements in rural life are proper items in a 4-H club program, when they seek to conform to the test of good standards. There is no divergence, in pursuing these activities, from the old essential purpose of the 4-H clubs.

I come now to one or two popular or newspaper conceptions of the purpose of 4-H club work. I wish to scrutinize these, because the public point of view is hard to modify; and, if wrong, it may be a damage difficult to repair.

The first conception is just about as follows: Extension work aims to make good farmers out of poor farmers. Now it is hard to change an old farmer. You must catch your farmer while he is young, in fact, before he is a farmer. Catch the housewife, before she is a wife or knows much about the house. Then your instruction will stick. Bend the twig toward practical scientific agriculture and home making. Don't wait till the twig is a tree. Is this idea of 4-H club work right? Is that the philosophy of the matter? My answer is, "With certain reservations and limits, yes. I see nothing essentially out of line in that general idea. Catch them young. But, let us not forget, we try to catch them old too. We are not so pessimistic about the old farmers as some people think."

There is a second popular conception very widespread, viz., It is good finesse and clever politics to convert the child to the ways of scientific farming, for then you will more easily catch the parents. Bait your hook with the child, and you stand a good chance to land the father and mother. Is this good extension doctrine? Is it harmonious with the old essential objectives? Is this a present or a passing trend? My answer is that as a principle of action to guide the 4-H club work, the idea to use the child as a means of influencing the parent is pernicious, for it contains the high possibility of damage to the child, damage to the instructor, and damage to public confidence. The liability to damage in this situation is not wholly due to "exploitation of the child." Rather the damage grows out of an abnormal psychological situation created by a primary attempt to change the habits of parents. The instructor whose eyes are on the parents is put into a false position, and is not only apt to yield to temptation to do things not for the good of the child, but he suffers injury to his own self-respect by being in a sort of secret service. Moreover, the truth always leaks out, and the public loses faith in the system of instruction, and cries out "Exploitation of the child." The principle is dangerous just because the child lends itself so well to the idea. In fact, the relation of child and parent is so intimate that an achievement of the child has involuntarily and automatically a profound influence upon the parent; and a casuist through a line of sophistical argument can put up a very plausible case for the principle as a proper objective. I shall give some attention tomorrow to the legitimate aspects of this matter. But the dangers to all concerned are so damaging that I would not agree to erecting this popular idea into an objective. I believe, moreover, that any possible abuse in the past of 4-H club work by adherence to this objective is rapidly passing. One good reason is that the parents are already alive to good farm practice and home making in many respects, and the temptation is not so great with leaders to let their thoughts stray in this direction away from the good of the child.

And now, if you will bear with me a few moments, I wish to bring under a little closer scrutiny the original objective of 4-H club work, viz., science in agriculture and home making. In plain English, is the production of a pig, hen, calf, sheep, acre of corn, from improved or the best stock; or the making of a loaf of bread, a can of fruit or vegetables, a high-class, dignified, worthy task for a boy and girl in the formative period of life? Is there not a baseness about the medium which nothing in the profit-making character of the achievement can redeem? Is this effort not thoroughly materialistic and too dangerous to be the great aim of a child of tender, susceptible years? Should the energies of the boy and girl not be directed rather toward some non-profit-making task, and especially toward some accepted cultural set of aims? Preferably an esthetic, a religious, an humanitarian task? My answer is "No," plain "No." America has nearly got away from its intellectual prejudice that work - even manual work - is per se degrading - ever degrading, to anybody, at any time of life. In the days of helotism there was little chance for the hand-worker to possess refinement of soul. Refinement was a privilege - the privilege of the leisure class; work was the part of the slave. To work was to drop to a degraded level. Now, if refinement comes to a whole people, it must come through lodgment in the soul of the worker, for a democracy is a nation of workers. What is more natural, therefore, in such a democracy than for refinement, - culture, the amenities, excellencies - to arrive through the medium of one's work for a living, one's occupation, in which one seeks to serve the world and in return for which one, forsooth, get one's livelihood? In fact, if the worker is ever to achieve the perfections of life, from which he gains the applause of the world, must he not acquire much of this in the processes of his daily occupation, just because he has not time enough outside his occupation to cultivate his soul?

It must be pointed out, it seems to me, to all those engaged in leading boys and girls into the upper levels of agricultural and home-making achievement, that to aim toward a perfect type of animal or of crop, to a perfect type of home making, perfectly adjusted to the capacities of the community, and likewise perfectly adjusted to the needs of the State and Nation, is to take an unquestioned place among all privileged persons and classes who aim at attainment of "the good, the beautiful, the true," - an aim which, according to the standards of all ages, of all civilized peoples, is as high an aim as humans rise to. In very truth, the perfections reached in the purebred cow, the purebred ear of corn, the high-producing acre of soil, the wholesome loaf of bread, the sanitary can of fruit are distinctly applications of ethics, esthetics, and science;[1] on a par with the laureate's poem, the exquisite statue, or the self-denying deed. When a child thus achieves the perfect aims of agriculture and home making, in the mediums with which nature supplies the constant factor of life and growth attended by the infinite perfection of nature's mysterious handiwork as a cooperator, the child creates a piece of fine art, does a service to mankind which is ethically good, and exemplifies the idealism of science in a thing which must be pronounced true.

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[1] I wish here to mention my indebtedness in the elaboration of this concept to Prof. John R. Common's Utilitarian Idealism, appearing in the Intercollegiate Magazine, December, 1909.

Boys and girls of the 4-H club movement deserve to know the full meaning of their objectives and deserve to feel the ecstacy of distinguished performance. They should be assured of the opportunity in 4-H club work of being artists as well as workers; of being service-bearers to the world, as well as being profit-takers for themselves; of being truth-builders, as well as being busy in affairs.

It is possible for a child, while a child, to reach a level of moral achievement which he will never, as an adult, surpass - an achievement that all his life will act as a pacemaker for himself. That childish performance will stand him in stead when, as a grown-up, he is tempted to succumb to the easy-going ways of life. I recall such an incident in my own early history. When I was twelve years old, my mother started out early one summer morning with the old family horse and buggy and three small children, leaving the country parsonage in the hills twelve miles south of Syracuse, N. Y., for a vacation. She was to drive to Syracuse, go through the city, and reach my grandfather's farm, six miles to the north of Syracuse. We bade her goodbye, my father and I, and an hour passed, very lonely for me, I remember. Suddenly my father called. I ran to him. "Mother has left her satchel containing her best dress," he said, very much perplexed, indeed. "What shall we do?" he asked. I don't know," said I, perfectly bewildered myself. "I know," he replied. "You will take the satchel to her. Before you get down Lord's Hill you will catch a ride with some farmer going to the city, and will overtake her. Old Nell is a slow horse."

A ten-pound satchel, a small boy, a mother needing her best dress. The motive was strong. I trudged a mile to Lord's Hill. No farmer. I went two miles down the hill. No farmer. I walked on through the Indian Reservation, through Onondaga Valley, through Syracuse, up the old Plank Road. No farmer, no money for street car or stage. Up to grandfather's cottage under the chestnut trees, in the late afternoon. My mother was finally caught up with, and her best dress delivered.

I have wearied on many a hike, as an adult, with a pack of a few pounds strapped securely on my back, but I never have since then endured so much as, carrying in my hands that ten-pound satchel, I did in walking those twenty miles. Nothing I have ever done tested my mettle so completely as carrying that dress to mother. And do you think I do not now know the meaning of the sentence, "The child is father of the man?" I solemnly say to you to-day that the 4-H club work is producing in children and youth achievement which will later in the adulthood of the same persons prove stimulating to high endeavor.

My conclusion, after scrutinizing the old objectives of 4-H club work is that the original purpose, viz., to incorporate boys and girls into the great general movement to produce a perfected type of agriculture and rural life, is not only distinctly warranted, but is still the heart of the 4-H club work. Tomorrow I shall call your attention more particularly to the effects of a legitimate club work upon the character and personality of the boy and girls

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A NEW EMPHASIS

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Yesterday I reaffirmed the legitimacy and value of the old objectives of 4-H club work. I gave full approval to the idea of bringing boys and girls into the national scheme to create and maintain a perfected type of agriculture, farm home, and rural life. The laws of Congress clearly envisage this aim. The capabilities of the boy and girl are adequate to this task. The history of uninstructed farm practice in America shows this capacity of the boy and girl to produce under the eye of an adult many products, thanks to the partnership of nature, as perfect as an adult can produce them. The history of the 4-H club work further demonstrates this capacity of the boy and girl. I intimated, in closing yesterday, that the type of product sought in the 4-H club work is a high work of art, a high work of ethics, a high work of truth-building. I said that the boys and girls should be assured by their leaders that these products toward which they aim are in their perfection "good, beautiful, and true," and stand therefore on the level of the highest attainments of the race. My discussion yesterday was quite largely a scrutiny of the character of the products of the 4-H club work - that is, an objective discussion of objectives. Once or twice it was necessary to touch upon the subjective effect upon the boy and girl of these objectives. To-day, I wish to scrutinize particularly the effect upon the boy and girl of 4-H club work, and to appraise the objectives as factors in character-building and in the cultivation of a high quality of personality. Naturally this part of the discussion brings us face to face with the relation of the 4-H club program to the education of the boy and girl.

Quite evidently, in the few minutes at my disposal, I can not adequately discuss the ins and outs of this question. I shall not even attempt to discuss many mooted questions, such as administration, control, and relation to the public school system. All I shall attempt is to sketch in broad lines some of the major effects upon the boy and girl, and to indicate certain limitations of 4-H club work as an educational instrument.

We must recognize and admit to all concerned that the 4-H club work is essentially an educational process affecting the habits of workmanship; habits of individual thought and behavior; habits of social thought and behavior of the boy and girl, at the same time that the club work is building up an outside industry called agriculture. The systematic pursuit of a formal project under leadership and instruction with eventual demonstrations, necessarily brings to pass new experience to the boy and girl, which trains their responses to new stimuli and new social situations. They can not learn to do the things they do, as if they were tricks without a trace in the nervous mechanism. As children work, they themselves are changed, just because they are still in rapid growth and because they are still very receptive and plastic. What they do makes a difference with them; makes an habitually better workman presumably; makes a more intelligently social being; enlarges the horizon of their lives, as it brings them into larger and larger contacts with other clubs. This experience in 4-H club work so changes the direction of character and personality that boys and girls pursue a far different way of life as the future unfolds from what they would pursue without any such experience. To sum up the case broadly, 4-H club work is, as it were, a radio-active agent in character-building, and is, therefore, educational. It is fitting, therefore, that we should scrutinize this agency as an educational instrument, to see whether it is adequate to the trust bestowed by Congress upon the extension service; to see also, if possible, what its genius is as an agency outside of the school system; and to see what emphasis is needed now in 4-H club work, as it is perceived better and better that the extension system is thus entrusted with an important educational function.

The characteristic of 4-H club work which quickly strikes one who is looking closely into it as an educational process is its voluntary nature. Boys and girls choose to be club members. It is a free choice. This freedom to choose is followed by a freedom to drop out, by a freedom to fail, as well as a freedom to exceptional success. The State does not compel membership, nor compel attainment of standards for lack of which penalties are exacted. Opportunity knocks at the door of boy and girl. They open or close the door. The very genius of the 4-H club is this untrammeled freedom to work and associate with a set of other boys and girls with similar impulses. The public school system is on a compulsory basis, and while good teachers may appeal to the voluntary nature of the child, and while many children make their efforts under compulsion almost as freely as if under a control of freedom, still is is probably true that this difference holds in essential respects, and it is well to point out the sequel of this difference.

The first great result of the voluntary character of 4-H club work is that successful 4-H club work will never enroll the majority of boys and girls; because most boys and girls of the ages 10 to 16 are not susceptible of sustained voluntary effort, even though many will attain that susceptibility later in adolescence or young adulthood. They require

compulsory tactics now at one point or another, and even compulsory tactics are frequently ineffective to produce the products aimed at. The objectives of 4-H club work are too serious, too divorced from play, make believe, mischief, to engage the majority. It is better to enroll the minority who will carry through, complete the project, than to contend with the majority, many of whom belong at these ages to another system of education.

A second feature of 4-H club work, growing out of the voluntary character of the membership, is the susceptibility of boy and girl to stimulation to high endeavor through the skill and enthusiasm of the adult leadership. Fine leadership is liable to be lost on children who can not rise to the voluntary in their efforts; but, contrariwise, voluntary effort reaches high levels under fine leadership, but falters ofttimes when leadership is dull and unimaginative. This phenomenon of the high levels reached by voluntary students under enthusiastic, skilled leadership is recognized and taken advantage of by educators in certain schools. For example, the wonders of the Folk Schools in Denmark have been wrought among youth and young adults upon a thoroughly voluntary basis under enthusiastic leaders. The popular kindergarten works its spell through much voluntariness. The Chautauqua Movement among adults years ago worked its way into the lives of many hard-working women through the door of intellectual voluntary opportunity. The seminar method of graduate study in universities is built on voluntary stimulation under fine guidance. Optional courses in college took their rise in the advantages of a free choice. Doubtless as time goes on a more discriminating recognition in 4-H club work of the limitations of voluntary education, and the miracle-working possibilities under skilled leadership, will improve materially the results of 4-H club work.

Let us come now to the achievement of a fine product under the project method with its subsequent public demonstration. What is the high point in this as a piece of education? I answer thus: "If the boy and girl produce under counsel a piece of agriculture or home making which comes up to recognized standards, they know it. If they don't do it themselves, they know that fact. And when they succeed in the product, they have the workman's reward which nobody can take away. They have inner joy; a selfverdict upon their own efforts, which itself captures them for future efforts." Success breeds success. Too much failure breeds failure. Some wise teachers trap their students into a success, as the physician traps his patient into a successful venture at walking during convalescence. At this point, it is well to recognize that a boy or girl who is too immature to do a project, who learns to fail rather than to succeed, may possibly be damaged by being over-encouraged into 4-H club work. Project work among those who can do things is one of the highest types of effective education. The old-time apprentice was made a real workman on this principle of learning to do the real thing. With many well-recognized reservations with respect to maturity and adaptability

of boys and girls for projects, with respect to leadership, frequency of counsel, the project method may be considered a high type of education, for its effect upon character, quite apart from its place as a helper to agriculture.

We approach now one of the most important parts of the educational process in the 4-H club program, growing out of the voluntary character of the club work, viz., the development of habits of social action. The very nature of the 4-H club, its organization, its teamwork with other clubs, the relation to a State and national set-up, insure continual experience in thinking with and working with and thinking and working for others. The voluntary nature of the 4-H club permits the social behavior to reach its climax under freedom in accord, however, with the social standards of our best civilization. It would be difficult to overestimate the educative influence of this experience, especially as no comparable avenue of socialization is open to boys and girls in rural communities. This does not mean, however, that 4-H club work is in any sense a substitute for the usual social agencies of the community. It only means that here is an additional agency supplementing community agencies. The import of this feature in the educational career of rural boys and girls turns on the fact that rural life as a whole needs a great amount of sane, wholesome social attitude, habit, and experience. These boys and girls simply can not by disuse atrophy the social experience gained in 4-H club work. It will have become part and parcel of character and personality.

I promised yesterday to say something today about the legitimate influence of 4-H club work in the farm home and community upon the parents and adults. I will do so now. Let me quote what I have written on this matter in another connection:

"The idea of the child as torchbearer for the race is familiar, but its application to rural life, perhaps, has not been fully enough made. The infant and little child is toy and plaything for adults on the farm, as everywhere else, and unquestionably does his part in keeping joy alive in the hearts of his parents; but the significant fact, from the point of view of the rural family group, is the amazing mental receptivity of the child, which excels in certain respects the capacity of all other members of the family. As the most impressionable organism on the farmstead, the child, free from the bias of long established habit and settled attitudes of mind, responds quickly to the present, the contemporaneous, the new. His powers and habits of inhibition are not yet full developed. The passing fact, opinion, impulse, is registered in the child. The imitative facility of the child is always ready, therefore, to receive and assimilate from experience the new, which the adult either does not notice or discredits or declines.

"Who can best gain the ear of the adult, especially in a matter contrary to present adult habits and modes of thought? Is it not the adult's own child? And is this child not the unbiased witness to the fact, to the thought, the mode, the doctrine, the philosophy, that he receives?

"The social role of the farm child in the family partnership has always been important; keeping the home young, keeping the mind of the aging adults supple. But in the reorganization of rural society, the social role of the child will be made a leading one alongside that of the farm woman. The child must be related to the world of new experience, gain his contacts, and hurry home day by day, carrying and depositing dynamic ideas in the family group where is held the money, capital, institutions, which furnish the forces of reconstruction of rural society."

Now to apply this phenomenon to the present case. The boy and girl will take home to farm and community the ideas and practices learned in the 4-H club work, precisely as he and she take home all ideas they glean from whatever source. This is natural. This furthermore is the child's special role and function. If the ideas are old and good, they receive approval; if new, they run the gauntlet of criticism and final approval or disapproval. Nothing else is to be expected. And, perhaps, in farm homes even where modern farm practice and modern home making are well established, the boys and girls may still function through the enthusiasm of youth, to put optimism in the hearts of parents, and stop the hardening of the arteries of hope in connection with matters with which parents are familiar. With this analysis, now, you will doubtless see that it is unnecessary to make the child a bait to catch the parent. It is the child's business to teach parents at the point where parents need teaching and where the child can teach; but it is not your business or mine to seize upon this process and make it abnormal and therefore dangerous, by setting it up as an objective for the 4-H club work.

In conclusion, our two-day discussion has brought us back to the old legal objectives of 4-H club work, widened in conscious application by the fact of the widened scope of agriculture and home economics which has opened up its reaches to discernment through science. But our discussion has discovered to us that the 4-H club work as an agency or process, in working toward the old objectives, necessarily is educational, having a reflex influence upon the boy's and girl's character and personality. This phenomenon I have stressed as a matter calling for distinct recognition, attention, care - in fact, calling for so much responsibility that I have considered it as a new emphasis in 4-H club work. This becomes clearer when I say that, as the 4-H club work is educational, the various forces being brought into play upon the personality of the child must in all fairness to him and to her be in harmony with the best pedagogic principles. The methodology, therefore, of 4-H club work must submit to the standards of education so far as they apply, and I am confident that the administrators of the 4-H club work are equal to the task.